

Denouement

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Summary: It's the last day of the USS Enterprise's five-year mission, and no one refuses to admit that things are changing. But, maybe they're not.

Denouement

In twelve hours, the _Enterprise _will reach Earth Spacedock. Engineering swears that it's the slowest she can go, but frankly, no one else aboard thinks it's slow enough. The one thing the crew has come to a consensus on is that it's enough time to say some heartfelt goodbyes, make some speeches, and. . . party their hearts out.

Even the Observation Deck is crowded- someone with too much time on their hands had put up streamers and decided to blare two-hundred-year-old music through the intercom systems, meaning almost no one wants to stay in their quarters and miss the fun. Leonard has to weave his way through the crowd, bumping into people here and there and attempting to dodge enthusiastic lieutenants who want to end the mission on the high note of successfully landing a hug on the ship's resident grouch.

Once he fights his way into a turbolift, he sags in relief against the wall. It's going to be a long night, and not just because he'll have to finish packing his things once all this is over.

"Doctor McCoy?"

He starts, then realizes Uhura's in the turbolift with him. "Uhura! Goin' to the rec rooms too?"

Uhura smiles broadly. "'Have to get a good look at it before everything's refit, don't I?'"

Both Leonard and the turbolift make a hum of acknowledgment. "That's right, you're staying here after the refit." He's not surprised,

really; though most of the crew will leave the _Enterprise _to serve on different starships once they're done here, he can't imagine the bridge without Uhura. Then he shakes himself mentally- he doesn't _need _to imagine the bridge of a ship he won't ever set foot on again.

"And _you're _up and leaving, I heard."

The turbolift doors whoosh open in lieu of Leonard responding. He gives Uhura a bitter smile; she pats his arm in understanding. "We'll run into each other again," she says as she steps out, "so there's no use saying goodbye."

Uhura vanishes into the crowd with a laugh.

* * *

><p>"Watch where you're going!" snaps Leonard for what has to be the fifth time in as many minutes as yet another person bumps into him. When he doesn't hear an apology, he turns around and-</p>

"Easy, Bones!" says Jim, laughing. "What's got you so riled up?"

"The fact that _some_ folks don't know better than to slam into people holdin' drinks."

"You'll live," Jim says. He shakes his head, eyes twinkling, and turns to watch others walk by. "You know, I'm going to miss this."

"Yeah, well, _I_ won't miss having to stick everyone with hangover hypos."

Jim chuckles and elbows Leonard. "That's not what I meant, and you know it."

They watch a clearly drunk (or just extremely affectionate) ensign stumble around, giving everyone hugs and crying just a little bit into their uniforms. When he reaches the captain and the CMO, though, he stops short, turns halfway to leave, and is promptly enfolded into a bear hug by Jim.

The ensign is too startled to cry into Jim's uniform as well. "You're a good hugger, Ensign Tate," Jim says when he lets go, beaming.

Tate's mouth makes a small "o" of surprise. ". . . Thanks, Captain?" He glances around, lets out a nervous laugh, and scampers away to presumably hunt down more people to hug.

"Oh, now, I see what'll you'll miss. You'll miss terrorizing your crew!" says Leonard, from where he's safely hidden from any wannabe-huggers.

Jim cuts a sideways glance at him, raising an eyebrow in a disturbingly Spock-ish way. "Terrorizing, Doctor?"

Leonard grins but doesn't look directly at Jim, instead fixing his eyes on a distant star he can see through a window. "You've been

unpredictable since the second you stepped on board."

Out of the corner of his eye, he can see Jim's smile droop ever-so-slightly. "Well, this crew won't have to put up with my _unpredictability _for much longer, will it?"

"It's not too late to refuse to the admiralty, y'know." At Jim's silence, he presses. "Hell, if you announced that you're backing out in one of those live interviews we're going to be bombarded with when we get home, Starfleet probably wouldn't have time to do damage control and'll just let you go."

They're both quiet. Amidst the clatter and rush of people moving around them, talking and laughing and maybe even crying, Leonard wonders if he's gone too far, stretched the thin peace that'd fallen after the blowup the day before (_Leonard yelling, Jim barely speaking except to shout back, Spock trying and failing to keep his voice even)_.

"Bones—" Leonard relaxes; if they're using nicknames instead of titles, they're okay, "- we've already discussed this."

"I know."

Over in the corner of the room, there's a minor commotion. Leonard cranes his neck, half-expecting to see Chekov emerge triumphant from the drinking contest that'd been going on. But no, the actual cause is. . .

. . . Spock.

Two weeks ago, Spock lurking in the rec room and conversing with other crewmembers wouldn't have been an unusual sight, but now (Leonard feels an uncomfortable knot in his chest that hadn't been there before), it is. Bracing himself for the ensuing conversation, he fights the impulse to just down his entire drink in one gulp.

"Spock!" calls out Jim, beaming. Leonard risks a glance at him and notes that his eyes are full of the same determination that'd managed to get Spock out of his shell only a couple of years ago.

Spock looks up. "Captain, Doctor McCoy," he replies tonelessly.

"Spock," repeats Jim. "We're off-duty and at a party; you don't need to call me 'Captain'"

Spock neatly sidesteps the request (Jim looks as though he's been stabbed in the heart). "Captain. I still do not understand the purpose of celebrating the end of a mission."

The voice, the same old, bland "I don't understand humans" voice, is enough to make Leonard put down his mint julep and clear his throat. Maybe it's the atmosphere, with all the emotions running high and the music beginning to grate on his nerves, but he needs to get one last argument in. For the sake of his friends? Yeah, for the sake of his friends. At least his voice starts off levelly enough- must mean he's learned something from the Vulcan.

"Oh, it's bad enough you've been getting steadily more Vulcan for the past few days, but you can't just pretend you've forgotten every 'illogical' thing you've learned about us humans, Spock."

"Doctor, if I am to attain _kolinahr-_"

"Damn you," Leonard hisses, and now he's just as angry as he was the night before, only back then, the other man had at least tried to fight back. "Damn you, Spock, you can forget about us _after _you leave the _Enterprise _, but right now-"

He freezes, because the flicker of emotion that he'd been trying to stir up has appeared, only it's regret and hurt instead of anger that matches his own suddenly-abating fury. "I do not intend to forget either of you," says Spock softly.

"I _know _," says Leonard for the second time that night, though he's not sure if he ever really will.

The three- blue, gold, and blue- stand like that for some time, ignoring the others whirling around them, chatting and singing and laughing over the memories of the misadventures they've had. They don't have time to do all that, thinks Leonard, only enough time to force themselves to accept that everything they'd built the past few years will fall apart.

It's somehow okay, because the same idea's reflected in Jim's and Spock's eyes.

"Captain! Captain!" yells Sulu over the cacophony, and the tentative silence pushing them apart is broken. Jim turns around. "I think it's about time for that speech, sir!"

Spock raises an eyebrow. "A speech, Captain?"

Jim's face melts into a warm grin. "Shh, it's a surprise," he says cryptically, and, pulling out a stack of notecards, he makes his way over the where Sulu's standing on a table and trying to get everyone to quiet down.

"That's never good," says Leonard, staring after him. "'Think the surprise is just gonna be him telling embarrassing stories about this crew?'"

"It is very likely," replies Spock simply. Leonard laughs, and together, they head towards their captain to hopefully avert any crises.

For a moment, everything's just as it's always been.

* * *

><p>In twelve hours, the Enterprise will reach Earth Spacedock.

Save for the computer's chirps and fizzle-pops, the shuttlecrafts they'll board to get to San Francisco will be quiet. When they finally land, the one with the suddenly legendary bridge crew and the even more legendary captain will whirr to a halt, the computerized voice pleasantly announcing the detection of several hundred humanoid

life forms around them. Then the people inside'll get to their feet, trying to drag out the moment as long as possible by fixing a rumpled sleeve or toying with hair, before assuming the personas the reporters'll expect: brilliant engineer with his head in the clouds, brilliant helmsman with a penchant for the most obscure of hobbies, brilliant navigator with a ridiculously patriotic streak, brilliant communications officer with a lyrical voice that has a hint of steel, _brilliant brilliant brilliant. _

But Jim won't dawdle (_ captains go first _), instead springing to his feet, linking one arm with Spock's and the other with Leonard's, and then pressing a button to open the doors. He'll squint into the sea of journalists and the bright sunshine, glance at the people on either side of him, and, unpredictable as always, pull them out the shuttlecraft along with him.

The three- blue, gold, and blue- will step out together, a team for a little while longer.

End
file.